



the Blue Sheet

Practical Application of Iowa's Blueprint for Permanency Ideas for Foster Care Review Boards

Every child deserves a forever family! Achieving permanence requires an unequivocal commitment from all sectors to ensure that every young person served by Iowa's child welfare and juvenile justice systems leaves those systems with safe, loving, and enduring relationships that are intended to last forever. *Iowa's Blueprint for Forever Families 2011* presents a framework and recommendations to guide permanency efforts. Moreover, it is a *call to action* for all partners to contribute to achieving permanence for children and youth.

This supplement to the *Blueprint* builds on ideas generated at the May 2011 Children's Justice Permanency Summit. It identifies a set of concrete actions that you, in your role as a Foster Care Review Board member, can incorporate in your daily work to help achieve permanence for these children and youth.

Family and Youth Engagement

Every family and youth should have a voice. Outcomes improve when youth and their parents are active participants in their own planning and service provision. When parents are empowered, guided, and supported in their parenting efforts, and when youth's opinions are valued and fostered, lines of communication open up and more candid conversations about issues and barriers to safe case closure can be dealt with in a strength-based environment.

What you can do...

- ☐ Start the review by first asking the parents and child/youth for their comments and updates on progress
- ☐ Commend parents and youth when progress or good efforts are presented during the review
- ☐ Ask parents if they understand and agree with what is expected of them
- ☐ Listen to youth and families first; instead of trying to resolve
- ☐ Empower the families to identify their barriers/issues; help/guide them to identify resources

Family Preservation

First and foremost children belong with their birth families. In most cases, children and youth are best served by preserving and supporting families. Family preservation efforts include short-term, family-based services designed to assist families in crisis by improving parenting and family functioning while keeping children and communities safe. In juvenile justice, diversion strategies and home-based services recognize that youth can be rehabilitated and communities can be safe without separating youth and their families.

What you can do...

- ☐ Ask all parties what they are doing or could be doing to avoid additional family disruptions

Note: FCRB's conduct reviews only of cases where a child/youth has already been placed in foster care. See the following "Placement and Reunification" section for ideas about what FCRB members can do to promote family preservation through the reunification of families who have had a child/youth placed in foster care.

Placement and Reunification

Regardless of the reason, children are traumatized by removals from their home. When out-of-home placement is necessary, it is critical for everyone involved to engage immediately, adopt a sense of urgency, and utilize all services and individuals connected to the family to launch the reunification process. When reunification is not possible, it is critical to ensure that the youth is connected to at least one committed relationship with another loving, caring adult.

What you can do...

- ☐ Ask the family, "What do you feel you need, that is not being offered, to get your child(ren) returned home?" —listen to their answer
- ☐ Determine if family team meetings and family interactions are taking place; urge all parties to avoid excuses that there is no one to supervise visits, recommend they find alternative approaches immediately
- ☐ Have parents and all parties describe what still needs to be done for reunification to occur
- ☐ Ask parents if they have seen their court orders and understand their content and the time limits that DHS and the court must adhere
- ☐ Ask the parents what challenges they have in meeting the requirements of the case plan

Adoption and Guardianship

Children in out of home placement who cannot be reunified need permanency. Adoption and guardianship are preferred permanency options as opposed to long-term foster care. All children and youth can be adopted regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, special need or sibling group size. When individual circumstances determine that adoption is not the best option, guardianship is another avenue to permanency.

What you can do...

- ☐ Recommend active concurrent planning from the beginning of the case that includes searching for and prioritizing family members/friends as possible adoptive parents/guardians
- ☐ Recommend a preliminary home study for family members who might be placement options to indicate if a full blown home study should be done
- ☐ Ask the child/youth (if age appropriate) with whom they would consider living
- ☐ Ask parents about what they would like to happen for their children in the event that the children could not be returned home
- ☐ Ask if a "Life Book" has been started for any child/youth awaiting adoption; if not, recommend it be started immediately.

Transitioning to Adulthood

It is never too late to achieve permanence. Older youth face a unique set of challenges and risks as they move into adulthood. When youth age-out of foster care they often lack the financial, emotional, educational,

and protective support typically provided to young people in permanent, intact families. Permanence remains a vital and critical need for these young adults.

What you can do...

- ☐ Request and recommend that transition planning begin earlier
- ☐ Try to help youth identify at least one “connection” during this transition period that will be available to them in the future (*e.g.* relative, foster parent, etc.)
- ☐ Ask early on whether the initial transitional meeting has taken place for the youth
- ☐ Ask what life skills training is being provided to the youth; recommend skill-learning activities as needed
- ☐ Encourage youth turning 18 to take advantage of the opportunities offered (*e.g.* Dream Teams, Iowa Aftercare Services, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), college financial assistance, AMP) and to voluntarily stay in foster care until they graduate from high school